

School Programs Commodity Update

What's New in the Food Distribution Program for Schools

| ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE | |
|--|---|
| Commodity Forecast | 1 |
| Bonus Commodities Are Available for SY 2004 | 2 |
| USDA Announces Value of Donated Foods as 15.75 Cents per Meal..... | 2 |
| The Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS) is a Success! | 2 |
| Educational Materials and Ordering Option for Irradiated Ground Beef..... | 3 |
| Commodity Complaint Corner | 3 |
| Comments | 4 |
| Acronym List..... | 4 |

COMMODITY FORECAST

We are off to a good start with SY 2004 purchases, and most products will be delivered according to schedule. Two commodities have recently been added to this year's commodity listing. Cranberries (dried, frozen, and sauce) will be delivered from November 15, 2003, until April 30, 2004. Pineapple (tidbits, crushed, and chunks) will be delivered from December 15, 2003, until April 30, 2004. The complete listing of commodities offered to States can be found on our website at:
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/foods/sy04-schfoods.pdf>.

A new specification has been completed and approved for the frozen diced chicken. This was announced mid-August, and we plan to make deliveries by late October and early November. This product will be purchased in limited quantities.

Turkey crumbles are being considered for a future purchase. However, we are still awaiting new specifications. Our staff has participated in several taste tests on this product, and we are closer to purchasing limited quantities as a test buy before the end of the school year, if time permits.

The Agricultural Marketing Service, one of our sister agencies, is researching the availability of tuna in a pouch for schools. This new product might become available in limited quantities as a "test buy." Canned tuna will continue to be offered.

Ground beef purchases for deliveries between August through October have been slow. However, purchases for coarse ground beef destined for processors are now on schedule and orders for fine ground beef should be purchased by mid-October. We are currently working to purchase patties to meet schools' needs. Due to the discovery of a cow with Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, also known as mad cow disease, the United

States shut its border to Canadian beef to protect domestic beef channels. With decreased supplies of beef and demand remaining strong, prices have surged to a 10-year high. Fortunately, entitlement funds are available for purchases, and FDD is working closely with AMS to meet schools' requests for beef.

We do our best to keep you informed! If you need quick information and you have Internet access, go to our USDA's Food Ordering and Customer Service website to get bulletins on ordering updates and tips. The web address is: www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/focus/focus-bulletins.htm. In addition to the bulletin link, this website offers all kinds of helpful information such as contact names and email addresses, commodity files, and ECOS information.

BONUS COMMODITIES ARE AVAILABLE FOR SY 2004

USDA is offering schools a number of bonus commodities. These bonus products are being delivered September 2003 through June 2004. Some are available only in limited quantities. Available commodities are:

- Pudding, Chocolate & Vanilla, Ready-To-Eat
- Fruit Nut Mix
- Raisins
- Salmon in a Pouch
- Canned Peaches
- Frozen & Canned Apricots
- Frozen Strawberries
- Frozen Blackberries
- Raspberry Puree

USDA ANNOUNCES VALUE OF DONATED FOODS AS 15.75 CENTS PER MEAL

For the 2004 school year July 1, 2003 through June 30, 2004, USDA announced the value of donated foods or cash-in-lieu of donated foods it gives schools and institutions as 15.75 cents. The per-meal rate applies to each lunch served by schools participating in the National School Lunch Program.

For the 2004 school year, the commodity rate for commodity-only schools is 36.75 cents for each free, reduced price, and paid lunch served.

USDA announced this rate increase in the July 23rd *Federal Register*.



THE ELECTRONIC COMMODITY ORDERING SYSTEM (ECOS) IS A SUCCESS!

The Electronic Commodity Ordering System (ECOS) has been operational nationwide since February 2003. ECOS is an automated internet-based system that is allowing States and, potentially, recipient agencies to enter food orders directly into a centralized USDA food ordering computer system. The system also provides information on entitlement level, transfers, commodity recalls, and delivery order status.

There are currently 70 active State agencies and nearly 1,000 users on ECOS. We will

continue to make updates to the system, based on user requests. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services is currently pilot testing the system at the school district level.

The EDI-FDD system was shut down on June 30, 2003, as planned. States will have the option to decide whether or not to eventually make ECOS available to local recipient agencies, or continue using their own ordering and communication systems.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND ORDERING OPTION FOR IRRADIATED GROUND BEEF

In July 2003, USDA's Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, Eric Bost sent a letter and packet to all school superintendents and food service directors announcing that schools would be offered irradiated ground beef in January 2004.

The letter highlighted the importance of preparing the school community for determining whether to offer irradiated ground beef as part of the school food safety plan and included resource material and references to use as part of an irradiation educational campaign. The packet may be found at:

<http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov/Safety/FNSFOodSafety.htm>.

Educational materials developed by the Minnesota Irradiation Educational Campaign referred to in the letter from Under Secretary Bost will be available by a link on the Food Distribution Division web site at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd> on or about September 30, 2003. The materials will include irradiation consumer fact sheets, a public relations tool kit, and a state/local partnership-building guide.

COMMODITY COMPLAINT CORNER

We have received some complaints over the past year about all-purpose flour not performing well in certain baked products. The performance of all-purpose flour will depend on the type of wheat used to produce the flour. When the flour is made primarily of soft wheat, it has a soft and powdery texture. It has a high starch content and therefore develops a weak gluten. It is suitable for cakes, cookies, pancakes, and pastries where lightness and tenderness are key.

Schools that intend to use USDA's donated flour for baking bread and rolls may want to order bread flour since it has a higher protein content, relatively little free starch, and forms a strong gluten when mixed with water. Gluten is what makes dough elastic and traps gas from the yeast that allows the dough to rise. The harder the wheat, the more protein it will contain. Hard wheat flours are preferred for making bread, hard rolls, and hearth breads.

Durum wheat is too hard even for bread dough, and is milled into a coarse product called semolina, which is used to make very stiff dough necessary for dried pastas.

It may be helpful for schools to refer to USDA's Commodity Fact Sheets to identify the most suitable type of flour to use for a particular product. These fact sheets can be accessed at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/facts/schfacts/cats.htm>

Commodity Complaint Hotline

1-800-446-6991

or email

usda-fns-commoditycomplaints@fns.usda.gov

Comments

If you have any questions or comments on our products or services, please e-mail them directly to our Program Support Branch at: fdd-psb@fns.usda.gov, or you can write to the Food Distribution Division, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 520, Alexandria, VA 22302.

Acronym List

| | |
|------|---|
| AMS | Agricultural Marketing Service |
| CFN | Commodity Food Network |
| ECOS | Electronic Commodity Ordering System |
| FDD | Food Distribution Division |
| FDP | Food Distribution Programs |
| FNS | Food and Nutrition Service |
| FSA | Farm Service Agency |
| FSIS | Food Safety & Inspection Service |
| SY | School Year |
| USDA | United States Department of Agriculture |

Prepared by: Program Support Branch, in conjunction with Schools and Institutions Branch, USDA, FNS, FDD